‘Boy friendly pedagogies’: Producing girls and boys in early childhood contexts.

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Tēnā koutou katoa, ngā mihi nui ki a koutou, e pai ana ahau ki te kite a koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. Greetings.

I want to thank you for inviting me to address you this afternoon. When Jenny contacted me about the possibility of coming to the conference and of doing a gender session with you she wrote that the conference provides an opportunity to take a 'new second look' at every-day practices in curriculum: a new second look is, in my view, precisely the way to approach the notion of gender – an everyday/everynight practice (Smith, 2002), we all know and do gender constantly, almost to the point of disregarding or not noticing how much this aspect of our personhood shapes who and how we are – so today, I am going to ask you, me, us all, to take a new second look at some contemporary issues regarding gender, and education, and teachers' practices. Of particular interest, Jenny told me, is this contemporary notion that boy children in our early education settings are in need of a new way to teach them – different equipment, approaches, different activities even. And to get to that we will need to comprehend the means by which such understandings develop and shape our practices.

As I begin, I want to acknowledge that there is a problem for some boys in some parts of the New Zealand education system. The drop-out rates from school for Māori and Pasifika boys in particular, is alarmingly high, and totally unacceptable. We know that issues cohere around disengagement, literacy, and qualification attainment (Ministry of Education, 2007). The Education Review Office's (2008) studies into 'what works' for New Zealand boys in secondary school are beginning to shed light on how teachers might make their teaching relevant for the boys they work with in school; and for those who stay at school and aim for scholarship level qualifications, there is no gender disparity evident in achievement in comparison with their girl peers (Ministry of Education, 2007). It is the case that more girls in New Zealand currently go on to and complete tertiary studies (Callister, Newell, Perry &

Scott, 2006), and even though significant progress in economic, health and education outcomes for New Zealand women has been made in the last 20 years or so, the gendered wage disparity remains, with women still on average earning 12% less than their male counterparts (Ministry of Womens' Affairs, 2008).

Anyway, back to the topic at hand – you may be interested to know, I never really ever wanted to get into gender as a topic. Ironically, I remember well that when I was a teacher education student myself in the late 1980s and early 1990s I thought gender then, was so last decade! I also remember thinking, via the ego that comes with youth, that if I ever got to a point where I might be able to say anything coherent about early childhood education – like now – that it was definitely not ever going to be about something as old hat as gender! But then, life and the 1990s happened, and I found myself raising kids in a same-gender parented family and this, as well as my work with children and families in childcare made me reconnect with the power of gender in our lives. In the context of my own doctoral study – about sexualities more than gender, the absolute conflation of these aspects of our personhood – gender and sexuality – really brought to consciousness for me how intricately enmeshed our lives are with how we do boy and girl – whether we're aware of it or not. So I succumb – there's really no getting away from it, gender really does matter at a deeply personal and political level – and for young children we see this played out daily in the complex relationships children have with each other, us and themselves.

So my agenda for the keynote is three-fold. I want to think with you about some of the ways that gender does matter, for children, for teaching, for you - focussing on the 'idea' of the 'problem' of boy's education, I want to first set the scene for understanding how notions like 'boys need special treatment' come to the fore, and I'll speak to how I think it happened in NZ; then I want to explore how different understandings of gender help maintain or prove

useful for resisting such notions; and finally, to show how teachers' practices might close down or open up possibilities for children to express their gender in novel and unique ways. By the end of the keynote I hope to have you raising an eyebrow or two over the absolute necessity of this idea of 'boy friendly pedagogies' and reconnecting with your already vast resources to consider how to work with all children, boys included, in ways that will support their gender identities to flourish.

In general terms, what I am talking about today is what Glenda MacNaughton and I, in our 2007 paper on gender diversity called, 'boy friendly pedagogies'. In that work we set out to explore the problems and possibilities of seeking to employ boy friendly pedagogies in early childhood settings. Drawing from my own doctoral study (Gunn, 2008) and from a policy consultation about gender and education with young children in South Australia (MacNaughton, Dally & Barnes, 2004), we framed our exploration from the perspective of post-structural views on gender (Davies, 1989; MacNaughton, 2000). We wrote so as to unsettle the idea that there is an essential and proper way to be 'boy-friendly'. Instead we argued for policies and practices that were 'equity-friendly' and that worked towards gender diversity for boys and for girls. We wanted to reorient thinking away from 'the problem of boys education' towards the question, 'what's fair for different boys and girls in early childhood education?

What Glenda and I were responding to when we set about writing the paper in question, was the proliferation of public messages we were encountering about a so-called problem with boy's education in Australasia. We had individually, and collectively begun to wonder about 'the problem' – for whom, exactly, was education being a problem? Which boys were being disadvantaged and on what grounds? If there was a problem, and we could define its scope, was it really a problem in and for early childhood education too? And we were thinking

about the associated calls for boy friendly pedagogies: could our current understandings of what counted in terms of best practice, really be getting it that wrong? As a former teacher of young children myself – and parent of a boy and a girl – intuitively I thought no, and this is why I began to ask questions, intuition and common-sense is not enough to base teaching decisions on: the public discourses around issues in schooling for boys were pervasive and persuasive – what were we being told and what evidence of a failure were we being provided with?

I will always turn to the historical for a leg-in to understanding how 'problems' like the 'problem of boys education' emerge. I find value in taking a longitudinal view of phenomena like gender relations, politics, and movements for change: it provides me with a context for understanding how dominant discourses, such as 'underachieving boys' come to emerge (and of course, as I learned about discourse in my doctoral work (Gunn, 2008), to potentially disappear). Accordingly here are a few relevant ideas to consider: for a long time gender didn't really matter as an equity issue: well, it might have, at the local level when girls and boys, women and men challenged and resisted traditional and culturally expected patterns of relations between each other; but it wasn't really until the twentieth century that gender, in the West became an important and global site of struggle.

Then, in the 20th century, two major strands of thought governed how we considered gender and gender development to occur in children, and each of these had consequences for how we would approach the struggle. Some believed/believe gender to be a natural and subsequently predictable phenomenon whereas others believed/believe gender to be more malleable and learned. The biological discourses of gender, holding strongly to notions of essentialism, and to the chemical and physiological bases for how boys became boys and girls, girls, had us receive problems of gender relations as if they were/are inevitable: for example, we've all

heard and possibly used the phrase – "boys will be boys" – this is essentialism in action. But social learning theories that emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century on the other hand provided us scope for explaining gender as an outcome of experiences, of cultural and social patterning and of individual preferences. Here we might have viewed gender, as Davies (1989) explains it, as a bit of a "superficial social dressing laid over the 'real' biological difference" (p.5) between men and women, but here we saw hope in the possibility of changing inequitable gender relations for the better.

Near the end of the century, and in education, gender was all about equality of opportunity for girls. In early childhood education scholars studied children's play patterns, they noticed where boys dominated areas of the programme and encouraging girls in to play. The idea that gender was primarily biological was contested, and the influence of social learning theories was being seen. I admit, this was before my time in early childhood education, but when I became a student in the field in the late 1980's this was the state of gender theory that was to inform my practice as a soon to be teacher of the very young. Bruce MacMillan (1978) from the University of Otago, where I studied, had written about 'sex-role stereotyping' in pre-school claiming the importance of adult role modelling for overcoming inequities between boys and girls in early years education. Jan Halliday & Stuart MacNaughton (1982) had studied and written about sex differences in play at kindergarten showing that children's preferences of play activity were often gender related and reinforced through adult and peer modelling, but interestingly that NZ children seemed less stereotyped in their play than others similarly researched. And of course Anne Meade and Frances Staden (1985) had published via SET, their action research study about enabling girls mathematics learning in preschool in *Once upon a time, amongst blocks and car cases,* again, the emphasis was on inequity for girls and on broadening how boys could do boy. You can see how – in my naive youth – I thought gender had been well and truly done already – what

was even more impressive about these studies was that they had been done in NZ, surely there was nothing else to know!

But then, as we moved into the 1990s something started to change: and the swing towards equality of opportunity for girls, started to become framed as detrimental for boys, and international worry about a growing underclass of uneducated males (Barker, 1997) began to take shape. In response to international questions about the shape of boys' achievement in Western education, the ERO in the late 1990s, began looking seriously at the 'problem' of boys education (ERO, 1999) with a view to seeing if what was happening internationally was also playing out here. Concerns were raised about boys being outperformed by girls against most measures of achievement and our own school certificate achievement results seemed to be showing a disparity between boys and girls success at school. Drawing on traditional and essentialising theories about gender, the ERO advocated the position that boys and girls learned differently, they called for teachers to adopt teaching strategies and behaviour management styles that would cater for the differences, and they advocated for more male teachers and male role models in schools. Here we see the beginnings of an official discourse of 'boy friendly pedagogies' for New Zealand education settings starting to emerge. While also commenting in the report that not all boys and girls are the same, EROs work was nevertheless, a very clear step in the direction of constructing schooling in NZ as problematic for boys – per se – and the spectre of boy friendly pedagogies was entered firmly into our education discourses.

Following the ERO work, some large-scale initiatives were undertaken by the Association of Boys Schools in NZ, to further explore this problem of boys' underachievement. In 2001 former prison warden Celia Lashlie was invited to undertake a project looking at the special qualities of boys; to ascertain what their unique needs might be (the essence of being male)

and to hypothesise with boys and men who were involved in single-sex secondary education about what making a good man in NZ's 21st century might look like (Lashlie, 2004). I had a boy, in a single sex secondary school at the time – this is how I first learned of the work. Again, the stories about boys and education that circulated from the initiative centred on the notion that mainstream schooling was failing our boys, that boys per se needed special teaching strategies, and of course, that they needed teachers of particular kind (recall, this was an initiative of the NZ Association of Boys Schools) if they were to succeed.

The Ministry of Education literature review on gender differences in New Zealand schooling (Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000) represented a considerable step forward in seeking a more nuanced understanding of gender relations in school, then in 2004 our Ministry of Education responded to 'the problem' and established a task force to examine boys achievement (the Boys' Educational Achievement Reference Group) and to identify programmes that worked well for boys. The focus of the task force was squarely on establishing ideas about what worked well for boys inside classrooms and an outcome of the initiative has been the development of the 'success for boys' portal on .tki org (http://success-for-boys.tki.org.nz/). That website aims to help schools examine the quality of teaching-learning relationships with boys; it focuses on how schools might create supportive learning environments for boys; and it seeks to provide a range of approaches and tools to address their diverse learning needs. While arguably taking a positive step by having teachers think carefully about the quality of relationships with their particular students, the homogenising approach still pervades our thinking – it's as if 'all boys' were in trouble and this is simply not the case. What the task force did – even if unintended – was further institutionalise the notions that, a) school in New Zealand was failing boys; and, b) that we needed to employ 'boy friendly pedagogies' if we were ever going to be in a position to change this.

In early childhood education we were getting the message about boys being failed here too – albeit from a slightly different angle. With the publication of the report *Men at work: Sexism in early childhood education* (2006), Farquhar and others laid some challenging claims at the feet of our profession and wound these around what were for me, traditional, outdated and rather inflammatory ideas. It was claimed for instance that it was an embarassment that NZ had so few male teachers in early childhood education – well, I did/do agree that there is definitely a case to be answered in relation to a woefully disproportionate number of male teachers in our field – but was/is about the limit of my agreement with much of the report. The sexism report claimed our workforce to be "stuck in the 1970's family model" (p.iii), as if there was 'one'; it asserted that the high proportion of women in early childhood education teaching was detrimental to their economic and social development – pay parity is largely taking care of the economic argument, and with most New Zealand teacher education taking place in university settings there seems to me to be plenty of scope for women to be 'broadening their horizons' as they learn to teach; and there are other just as worrying claims made, but the most troubling for me was the one that argued that the pool of potential teachers is reduced by half because talented women don't come teaching and further, that children are at risk of substandard care as a consequence – I have been around the field for about 20 years now and know quite a few very talented men and women teachers working effectively with children and families. The idea that male teachers should be constructed as the remedy to substandard care provided by women was/is for me outrageous. Not only does it treat men and women unfairly, the gender of the teacher, as far as I understand it, has never featured as an indicator of either process or structural quality in early childhood education. But, as you can see, though the report, 'the problem' of education for boys in the field of early childhood education, is absolutely asserted.

So within a proliferation of cultural and social messages about gender differences and the challenges of meeting boys needs in education the 'problem' of boys education is made. Does this mean then that we, in early childhood education have a challenge to meet? Well I think it depends on what you believe in with respect to how boys and girls get and do their gender, and what part you think a teacher has to play in that process.

Here I've got a diagram that contrasts (in a very superficial and simplified manner!) three dominant perspectives on how children get/do gender <insert fig.1>. Now, I have a caveat before getting into this - theory is never pure – and our reception to it isn't either. So while I will talk about these perspectives on gender as if they were a coherent and insular account of how gender happens, what I want you to remember is when we encounter theory, it's never as easy or as clear cut as this image would lead us to presume.

As I ask you to consider where you sit on the gender theory continuum, you might find yourself thinking well, I take up a blend of these beliefs, I don't really sit anywhere in particular like this, but what I hope to show in the next few minutes is, if we believe in the absolute necessity of 'boy friendly pedagogies' and if I take what Jenny has told me in the lead up to this session as accurate, some of us do, then we must also believe there is an essential and enduring (singular) way of being/doing boy that we, as teachers, can prepare for and teach to. My question in the face of this idea – when we think of the many boys we know, and when we reflect on how they are and who they are trying to be – how could we possibly invest in the idea of the absolute necessity of boy friendly pedagogies, as if we believed unquestioningly that this was true?

So, what's going on here in the diagram? I've talked about the construction of 'the problem' of boys education and shown how it entered into both the public and institutional discourse of NZ education and in this have already spoken briefly about these first two dominant positions

on gender and gender development. Both essentialising theories, and by that I mean, both imbued with the idea that there is an eventually fixed and enduring way to learn to do and be masculine or feminine, the biological and social learning theories of gender will most likely be familiar to you all. In the biological deterministic argument we think of gender as innate, as inevitable and as fixed – there is a natural way to be masculine or feminine and nature will eventually lead all normally developing people there. From the social learning perspective we are more likely to think that gender is shaped, learned and eventually constant as children learn via their experiences the accepted way to be properly masculine or feminine in their cultural context. In relation to each other, these two are theories that both contradict and reinforce each other. Their major point of agreement, and the so-called fact that the 'boy friendly pedagogies' idea connects with is that gender is something that one has or possesses, in other words, they rely on the idea that gender is 'in' us and eventually (by middle childhood) fixed, but they contradict each other on the means by which this fixedness is achieved.

Of course there is a third perspective on gender on the slide too – the one that Glenda and I advanced in our paper, and the one I want to mix up our thinking with today... It takes up a feminist postructuralist perspective on gender which claims gender to be in what 'we do' not in 'who we are'. Privileging the performance aspect of gender (Davies, 1989; MacNaughton, 2000) – doing boy, or doing girl – this view contests the more traditional views on gender and gender development in important ways. First, it doesn't claim gender to be something 'inside' us – rather it takes the view that we 'do' gender, that gender inheres in the ways we act along lines of masculinity and femininity at any given time; this is the second major departure point of this theory in comparison with the others, it recognises flexibility – that we can all be a mix of feminine, masculine, or anywhere in between because we express our gender via 'subject positions' available to us the discourses we access with different people at

different times (Weedon, 1987) - so there is no single and fixed way to be properly masculine and feminine, rather gender relates to the discourse in play and is therefore flexible over time and place; and finally, the theory posits that we get some constancy in how we do our particular mix of gender because we desire to be recognisably male or female and we remember the performances of gender that achieve this as we interact with others over our lifetime – so gender is discursively produced – in concert with others. This is quite a different position on gender than one that says – gender is inevitable and ultimately fixed. Before we go on then, I want to have a look at some evidence of this post structural view on gender in play.

Here I have three very different accounts of children achieving themselves in particularly gendered ways in the contexts of early years education setting – these works have been around for a long while – for some of you, they may be familiar – what I hope to show by sharing data from these works, are the very active ways in which children work to achieve themselves as gendered through their interactions with others.

The first account is from Valerie Walkerdine (1981) whose observations of children and teachers in British nursery schools gives rise to a discussion of power and resistance between boys and girls, children and adults. Walkerdine observed an interaction between a 3-year old girl Annie, and two 4-year old boys, Sean and Terry. Their teacher Mrs Baxter was also present: I have censored some of the exchange – but you'll get the gist:

> *The observation began when Annie picked up a piece of lego and added it to a construction she was working on. Terry tried to take it from her and she resisted, Terry said:*
>
> *Terry: You're a stupid [expletive] Annie*
>
> *Mrs Baxter tells him to stop and Sean tries to mess up another child's construction. Mrs Baxter tells him to stop too then Sean said:*
>
> *Sean: Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter*

Terry: Get out of it knickers Miss Baxter

Sean: Get out of it Miss Baxter paxter

Terry: Get out of it Miss Baxter the knickers paxter knickers, bum

*Sean: Knickers, sh*t, bum.*

Miss B: Sean, that's enough, you're being silly

Sean: Miss Baxter, knickers, show your knickers

Terry: Miss Baxter, show your bum off...

[the exchange continues, getting more outrageous as the boys taunt their teacher until she responds]

Miss B: Sean, do and find something else to do please... (p.15)

I'll leave you for a minute to think about what's possibly going on here. Talk to your neighbour about Sean, Terry and Miss Baxter for a moment then I'll share Walkderdine's analysis and my own thinking about this exchange.

The Walkerdine data shows very clearly how gender performances relate with discourse and the taking up of positions in discourse. From the perspective of the teacher's discourse, she should be able to take control of the situation and pull Sean and Terry into line with her request for them to stop terrorising their peers at the block play, but Sean refuses to take the position of submissive-boy-child offered to him, and he says: 'get out of it Miss Baxter...' she doesn't respond and his mate Terry, seeing the possibility of also taking up a more powerful position in that moment, joins in the discourse and adds another element to it: that of sexism. The boys have immediately taken up a different form of masculinity that allows them to constitute their adult teacher as inferior to them on the basis that she is a woman. These are not boys – simply receiving their gender from role modelling and reinforcement, nor is there anything natural or inevitable about the sexist and oppressive gender relations playing out here, so our traditional theories of what's happening with respect to gender are failing us at this point. Walkerdine writes,

although the boys are not physically grown they can take the positions of men through language, and in doing so, gain power… Their power is gained by refusing to be constituted as the powerless objects in her discourse and recasting her as the powerless object of theirs. In their discourse she is constituted as 'woman as sex-object' and as that object she is oppressed. Of course she has not in a sense ceased to be a teacher, nor the boys children, but they have stopped being, for the moment, signified as them (p.16).

Davies' (1989) study of preschool children and gender in Australia offers other examples of children actively constructing their gender in multiple ways. One particular vignette of a boy in the 'home corner' is illustrative of how fluid gender can be for young children as they move into and out of multiple discourses with each other. I have here some rather heavily edited description of Davies' observation of George:

George is in the home corner on his own, he has the flimsy yellow butterfly cape on… He makes tea… goes to the highchair and says "I'll get the baby"… After feeding and reprimanding the baby he goes and gets a coat out of the cupboard and looks at two smaller boys playing blocks nearby. Running over to them, he kicks their blocks and says, "hey, stop fighting in their!"… then returns to feed the baby some more. He says to a girl standing close by, "You're the mother and I'm the father"… domestic life then plays out until George says, "Darling, is everything running on time? I'm going to be late for work" He gets a jacket on and heads off… (pp.81-82)

Davies explains that George is one of the few boys in the kindergarten who openly resisted the impositions of the male/female dualism. He liked girls and he wanted to play with them. She describes how he wanted to play in the 'home corner' and how he often used skirts and capes to give him a sense of power. In the episode described, George, initially on his own, is

able to enter into play usually only available to girls – he displays a range of behaviours including the mothering of a baby and being authoritarian. He can be kind and gentle to baby, somewhat of a bully to his smaller boy peers, and when his girl peer joined him, he readily handed over the position of mother and established himself as properly male in relation to her as he went off to work. Note how fluid George's transitions are: he has so much knowledge of how to 'do' genders of the masculine and feminine kind, and he works at these on his own, and in relation to others. He knows what the limits of how he can be with 'smaller boys' and 'wife-playing girls' are – and he can change very quickly in response to the circumstances he is finding himself in and creating with others. George isn't learning a fixed and singular way to be boy – he is learning to be boy diversely and uniquely, in concert with his peers.

And the final example of children actively struggling to achieve genders is a particularly queer one for us to reflect on. In it we meet Reg / Policeman Thelma (Taylor & Richardson, 2005) and glimpse how skillfully children can negotiate and break the boundaries of gender norms every day.

In another heavily edited and truncated piece of data, we meet the key players in the scene.

> *Two girls enter the space, rearrange furniture and small appliances and settle babies as they prepare food... Their peace is shattered by the arrival of a group of boys who tumble in and plunder the site, rifling through the closet grabbing police shirts and caps. Reg also snatches his favourite blue dress, once attired the boys gather round the table to discuss their plans... There are robbers, Reg grabs a clipboard, pulls his hat down over his brow, picks up a baby and gives chase... Asking his peer to hold his baby so he can write on the clipboard, the baby falls to the ground, Reg picks it up, consoles it and finds a teacher to had it over to, "I'm a policeman... and mother,"*

Reg booms, "my name is Thelma and this is my baby, can you look after her for me"... (pp.168-169)

Talk with your other neighbour for a moment about Reg: what stands out about his gender performance for you?

The home corner is transformed into what Taylor and Richardson describe as a "transgendered heterotopia" (p.169), a kind of mirror space that simultaneously reflects a real and unreal world back to the viewer. When the domestic space is taken over by the boys and turned onto a police station, it seems like the home corner cannot possibly exist simultaneously as both a girl and boy space – a series of symbolic changes has to occur for play to make sense – we see for instance the kitchen table becoming an office desk. Except for Reg – who successfully challenges the binary orderings in which he is enmeshed: domestic scene/work policeman/woman; mother/law enforcer – dress, hat, shirt wearing police officer – Reg works against or outside of the binarisms with great success: such is the complexity of children doing gender in their early years. Is there really a single way to be/do boy that teachers like you and me can learn to teach to?

So, what does this all mean for our notion of 'boy friendly pedagogies'? Well, I think that if we take up the biological or social learning perspectives then we will most likely invest in the idea that there is a need for boy friendly pedagogies – how else would boys get to be or learn how to be proper / normal boys in the absence of these? But a key problem with this is it homegenises boys – it doesn't look closely at which boys – if any are being failed by early childhood education – it helps us reinforce the notion that there is an essential and enduring way to 'be' a – in Lashlie's (2004) terms, 'good', or 'proper' boy/man – and it either renders the teacher surplus to requirements (as it the biological determinist view) or as deeply troubling – if your a woman or irreplaceable if your a man. Can it really be that simple?

I thought we were in a time where we thought of children as active participants in their worlds? We have another theory for how gender might occur, and an increasing body of research that shows children actively negotiating and constructing their gender identities with others – surely its time to go back to that question Glenda and I posed in 2007 – what's fair for boys and for girls in early childhood education?

For me, the joy in teaching is in the experience of having learners transcend or exceed what I am able to currently imagine them capable of – when I connect this to gender and to young children, this means that I have to step outside of what I might think is right / proper / normal for how children might do their gender, and to accept that their activity in this regard represents their ongoing struggle, within a community, to find what's right for them in the long term. We must reject gender essentialism – it's not boy or girl friendly – it might be friendly to some children, but as Glenda and I argued already, it ignores diversity between boys and between girls therefore ignores much of what it means to be boy or girl. In our efforts to sustain the gender categories through the take up of essentialising ideas, we act to sustain the relations between the categories and therefore the inequities they produce – is this fair for boys and for girls?

Addressing the needs of 'boys' in early childhood education requires a two step change in our thinking. First we have to reconceptualise the 'problem of boys' as how 'we define boys' NOT as how boys do 'boy'. We know that boys' do boy in a whole host of ways – that some boys are hyper-masculine on some occasions and sensitive and shy on others. That over time, as they practice doing gender, that boys will settle into their particular expressions of gender – that these will be fluid and responsive to the time and place they find themselves in. It's only us that seeks to establish and maintain a defined gender order that, if we narrow

down more and more just provides plenty more scope for kiwi boys to fail in comparison to. Is this fair for boys and for girls in early childhood education?

And finally, we have to recognise that teachers do have part to play in creating early childhood environments where boys – in all their diversity – and their girl peers can succeed. Show me the evidence for why we need to homogenise and compartmentalise what we might think we should do for boys in early childhood education, and I'll happily re-think my current position: but until I can see robust evidence of us failing our boys, I think I'll stick to arguing for gender diversity and equity.

To conclude, part of the mystery and attraction of gender – especially in early childhood education – has become for me, the realisation that we have a pattern of relations in play that, on the surface, seems so simple and non-complicated, but that on that 'second look' turns out to be so fluid and complex. The simplicity of the idea of 'boy friendly pedagogy' is a sure sign of needing to be aware. Perhaps it is time to take up the challenge of the conference theme, and to rethink and reconnect with your already vast resources for teaching into the 21st century. Consider the particular boys you work with – are you really failing them? How would you know?

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